

Historic, Archive Document

Do not assume content reflects current scientific knowledge, policies, or practices.

236056

F O R T U N E S W A S H E D A W A Y

"OUT FROM MUSKOGEE"

Broadcast No. 27 in a series
of discussion of soil con-
servation in the Ohio Valley.

WLW, Cincinnati

October 29, 1938 6:00-6:15 p.m.

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
SOIL CONSERVATION SERVICE
Dayton, Ohio

SOUND: Thunder, followed by rain...

RIES

Fortunes Washed Away!

ORGAN: I GET THE BLUES WHEN IT RAINS.

RIES

Muskogee County, Oklahoma, is not far from the southeastern lip of what newspapers call the dust bowl--but no dust storm problem is here. Muskogee gets better than 40 inches of rain most years, and in 1935 no less than 72 inches whipped down from Heaven to pare and rack what is left of Muskogee County's soil. Men, gray only at the temples, remember when much of this locality was an Indian paradise. Clear creeks with timber, gently rolling prairie, plenty of fish, plenty of birds, plenty of buffalo. But back to 1889, when thousands of future Oklahomans lined along the boundary that marked the divide between Kansas and their future home, their future paradise...

SOUND: People milling about, horses snorting, babies crying, etc.

PIONEER

Just about noon, ain't it?

BUDDY

Yeah, but we'll never start on time. Look at them horses tryin' to get acrost the line.

PIONEER

Ain't the horses. It's ever'body.

BUDDY

Including you and me. Hope we get something good.

PIONEER

Can't help but get something good. From what I hear tell, this Indian territory is nothing else but good!

BUDDY

Suppose many "Sooners" got acrost?

PIONEER

They's bound to. But they won't be more'n a passel of shot in a washtub. Man, this country's big.

BUDDY

Jist the same, I'd like to get started.

PIONEER

Me, too. Try and get in touch with me, Buddy, soon's you stake a claim and get settled like.

BUDDY

Sure I will, if we ain't too fer apart.

SOUND: Noises get louder. A few loud shouts.

PIONEER

You better get set, Buddy, they're gonna start.

BUDDY

All right. I'll see you in Oklahoma!

PIONEER

Oklahoma or bust!

SOUND: Volley of shots, loud cheers, pandemonium.

ORGAN: BEYOND THE BLUE HORIZON.

RIES

Oklahoma...home of the Five Civilized Tribes...Chickasaw, Choctaw, Cherokee, Creek, Seminole. In Muskogee County, the game is nearly gone now. The rivers are soiled with outwash of farms. Crops are not good on the eroded fields. The bottoms are by no means as rich, nor their people as happy, as they used to be. The Arkansas River, carrying rains that strike down from Pike's Peak and on through Western Kansas and Oklahoma, carries grit...for this continent is all of one body. If one part is wounded, the surface veins and the arteries of the Nation--its streams--bear ill.... In 1935, the federal government tried to do something about the Pecan Creek watershed in eroding Muskogee County.

SOUND: Car driving along muddy highway.

MERCHANT

You picked a nice road, Mr. Haston...but guess all roads around here are like it.

HASTON

Yep, all rutted clay roads. Just like these fields I'm going to show you.

MERCHANT

I guess I'm just a hard headed businessman. Of course, the fields are washing, but...

HASTON

...you bet they're washing...from here to Okmulgee and Mounds and Tulsa...

MERCHANT

Look out! Oh...

HASTON (muttered as he twists wheel)

Too late...oh...

MERCHANT

Swing her!

SOUND: Car slides into roadside ditch. Wheels spin in mud.

HASTON

No use.

MERCHANT

Not a chance of getting out.

SOUND: Motor cuts off.

HASTON

Oh, well, I want to show you a few things just like this. For instance....this mud in this ditch was washed out of that field.

MERCHANT

...and it's just about filled up the ditch, too. Well, glad I got these hip boots, even if we're not going fishing!

SOUND: Car door opens, men get out and slosh around in mud.

MERCHANT (laughing)

You picked a swell place to park, Clyde.

HASTON

Yes, just step right into my store, and try the latest styles in soil erosion.

SOUND: Gentle rain.

HASTON

It's started raining. Now look at this soil!

MERCHANT

Well, I've seen it wash before, but I never thought much about it.

HASTON

See! There goes just a thin layer with this rain...but a thin layer is about all that's left.

MERCHANT (pensively)

Too bad. Well, even so, we do need the rain.

HASTON

Yes, you do need it. You never get enough. That's one of the meanest ironies of erosion. The more your soil washes, the more rain you need.

MERCHANT

Hmmm....

HASTON

Hard subsoils don't absorb rainfall. The rain strikes, bites, and bounces off--with grit in its teeth.

ORGAN: MUDDY WATER.

RIES

The manager of the Pecan Creek watershed project, Clyde Haston, took W. G. Stone, Muskogee merchant, on that trip, and Mr. Stone saw enough, even with hip-boots and a stalled car, to realize why communities disappear, melt before the rain. And on a summer's day, Haston held a tour of businessmen...

SOUND: Airplanes droning. Hubbub of voices.

HASTON (fading in)

...and that's about all I have to say. After all, it was Mr. Stone's idea that we have this airplane tour.

SHOUT FROM AUDIENCE (bantering)

Yeah, he's full of ideas.

MERCHANT (addressing the group)

I thank the gentleman. Now, Clyde Haston didn't tell you everything that you're going to see. Maybe he's going to let you see for yourself. But anyhow, this project has been in about three years...is that right, Clyde?

HASTON

That's right.

MERCHANT

....and already it's recognized as one of the most outstanding soil conservation jobs in the United States. I think we ought to be proud of these Pecan Creek farmers....

SHOUT FROM AUDIENCE

Sure we are! (Everyone agrees)

MERCHANT

Here you're going to see adjoining farms on the same slopes, with their fields, terraces, outlet channels, meadow strips, and all that, locked into each other...soil defense you might call it.

AUDIENCE

(That's a good name for it, etc.)

MERCHANT

Anyhow, let's go see it!

SOUND: Men talking, airplanes start and fly away as ORGAN joins in to denote passage of time. Airplane sound continues.

HASTON

Now, you see that farm down there? That's H. J. Stebbins' farm.

BUSINESSMAN

Oh, yes, I know him.

HASTON

See, that's pretty steep land. It used to be cultivated, and it washed out in that gutted condition.

MERCHANT

You'd never know it now.

HASTON

It's been put back in grass. For that matter, a fourth of all the cultivated land in the watershed has been put in permanent grass or trees.

BUSINESSMAN

I can understand why.

HASTON

You see, burning and overgrazing were killing off the bluestem and the clover, but no more.

BUSINESSMAN

And there's an awful lot of that strip farming, isn't there? Gee, that's a pretty picture.

MERCHANT

You know, looking at this watershed from the air, seeing the curving fields and all that, it's just like...well, you might call it marbled.

HASTON

That's a good way of putting it.

MERCHANT

You know, the way crops are merged and wrapped around each other, just like the "mooney" marbles or "immies" we used to play with. It just looks right.

HASTON

And it is right. The whole prairie will have to be farmed this way. And the encouraging thing is the way tenants take to it.

BUSINESSMAN

These farmers are mostly tenants, aren't they?

HASTON

More than 70 percent are tenants. They want to farm right, once they're shown how. They want to take care of this land. Why, it gives them pride. They take hold of it, just like that land was theirs.

ORGAN: OKLAHOMA.

RIES

The aerial view of the Pecan Creek watershed swings, shines, and lives as the plane banks, whirls, and side slips. Ponds flash. Silvery arcs of water flash along terrace lines. Crops gleam, drinking deep of the water carefully stored, flourishing, rejoicing in the dying sunlight. For Muskogee County has welcomed soil conservation...

SOUND: Church organ playing softly.

NEGRO PREACHER (James Sanders of Blackjack Negro Church in Pecan Creek Watershed)

Ah'm takin' for mah text today, First Kings, the 18th chapter, the 21st verse. "How long halt ye between two opinions?" This is a story how Elijah, fed by the ravens in time of great drought and distress, came unto all the people. How long halt ye between two opinions? This is a tale of punished land, with dying grass and livestock, restored to life.

MAN IN AUDIENCE

Amen.

NEGRO PREACHER

Wrong doing caused it. Wrong doing caused the dead springs, the dying grass, the despair and hunger.

MAN IN AUDIENCE

Amen.

NEGRO PREACHER

But they saw the light! And I say to you, we're seein' the light, right here in Muskogee County! We wore out our land! We tore up our fields! We had despair and hunger! But we saw the light! We had two ways to go! One to ruination of the soil and ruination of the soul! The other--salvation of the land, and salvation of the soul! And to you who wonder about dying grass, gullied hill-sides, dead springs...How long halt ye between two opinions?

ORGAN: Up On Church Music.

RIES

Worn soils, sparse grass, short crops and suffering are an old story along the frontiers of this world as, continent by continent, its frontiers have been taken. But in Muskogee County, Oklahoma, on the lip of the dust bowl, is a heartening picture, a picture of conservation. How long halt ye between two opinions?

ORGAN:

RIES

And now, Ewing Jones, of the Soil Conservation Service, in Dayton, Ohio.

JONES

Thank you, Joe Ries. And before you ask me, I'm going to tell you that I enjoyed this story of Oklahoma's outstanding soil conservation project just as much as you did.

RIES

That's right, you're originally from the Sooner State, aren't you?

JONES

Yes, born and bred in the land of cotton, oil, wheat, lead, zinc, coal...

RIES

....just to mention a few of the state's leading products. Anyhow, you ought to be able to give us a first-hand picture of the soil conservation work in Oklahoma.

JONES

I think I can do that, all right. Frankly, what has happened in Oklahoma's agricultural lands is appalling. Here is a state, born in 1907...with 16,000,000 cultivated acres, and 13 million of them already suffering from severe soil erosion.

RIES

But from the story of the Pecan Creek project, they're doing something about it.

JONES

Oh, they are! That's the bright side of the picture. Not only in Muskogee County, but all over the state. You see, the first soil conservation project in Oklahoma was in Payne County, near Stillwater. Now the state has 10 projects and 21 CCC camps, all working to control soil erosion. You see, Oklahoma is a rich agricultural state, and in spite of past mistakes, it's taking steps--and big steps--to maintain that fertility.

RIES

That means that it has passed the soil conservation districts law.



JONES

Yes, it passed the districts law last year, and districts are already getting under way. Naturally, those districts will get a lot of help from the experience of the Pecan Creek project, as well as the other projects and CCC camps that are distributed throughout Oklahoma.

RIES

You know, that story intrigues me. As I get it, most of the slopes are strip cropped, terraced, or both.

JONES

And pastures are contour-furrowed, to halt and absorb run-off. You might say that the grasslands are corrugated with level furrows...

RIES

Sort of like a washboard.

JONES

That's right, like a washboard, instead of being left to wash like a roof or cellar door.

RIES

And a lot of the land has been put back in grass, where it belongs. Is Bermuda grass being used?

JONES

Very much so. Bermuda grass, once fought and scorned, is welcomed now, as it pins down the scarred hill pastures. And it's used in grass waterways and terrace outlet channels. The state highway department, of course, uses it to keep the shoulders and roadside ditches from turning into gullies.

RIES

I read last year that Pecan Creek stayed in its banks during heavy rains, while nearby creeks overflowed as usual. That means that the soil conservation practices are holding the water on the land...

JONES

....holding the water, and the soil. And get this, Joe: 99 percent of all cultivated land in the Pecan Creek watershed is worked on the contour now, instead of up and down hill. That is soil conservation.

SOUND: Thunder, followed by rain...

ANNOUNCER

Next week, _____

SOUND: Up on thunder and rain...

ANNOUNCER

Fortunes Washed Away is an educational presentation of the Nation's Station.

#

